

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

NOVEMBER 2009

FOUR DOLLARS



Mountain Mallards



Poacher Profile



Late Fall Turkeys



Commonwealth of Virginia
Timothy M. Kaine, Governor

HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE FEES

Subsidized this publication

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Inland Fisheries
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Bob Duncan Executive Director



November ushers in our general firearms season and my mind, of course, turns to safety. A brief review of hunting incidents is provided here by Sgt. David Dodson. It looks at some of the factors that have changed over the past 30 years and others that provide a long-term perspective on our progress promoting safety afield. Hunter education classes are in full swing across the state, and it is my pleasure to thank the many volunteers who serve the Department, and all Virginians, in this capacity. Safety is our number one priority as we trust it is for you, too.

As the season brings with it colder, shorter days, I think of my friends who are "touched" enough to pursue waterfowl, often on frigid waterways or from the sparse seating of a well concealed duck blind. Tee Clarkson's feature will provide a little insight into the mind of a duck hunter, though it is a mind that few of us can understand. His story reminds me of a gentleman who came before our Board many years back, requesting more late season days to hunt, admittedly during inclement weather. As I remember it, that man sparked plenty of laughter when he said, "Duck hunting is a suffering sport. If you're not suffering, you're not duck hunting."

Inside this edition of the magazine you will also read about late

fall turkey hunting. What a wonderful time to take advantage of the school holidays to invite a young hunter afield. Or, introduce a kid to the clever antics and instincts displayed by old tom, by inviting that youngster to accompany you with an Apprentice Hunting License.

Also of note is a story about poaching—a problem that continues to plague wildlife management across the country and around the world. Poachers threaten the security of all wild animals and their trade is particularly nasty and difficult to track. We lean on many sources for information to come down on the bad guys. Hunters and other wildlife enthusiasts can help us by maintaining an "ear to the ground" in this regard. If you do witness or become privy to acts of poaching or other wildlife violations, it takes just a few minutes of your time to report that to us, at 1-800-237-5712.

As always, I would be remiss if I did not plug the tireless efforts of the Hunters for the Hungry program that distributes venison to struggling families across Virginia. This year, the need is great and budgets are tight. If you can help out through a financial donation or sharing your harvested game or volunteering some time, I encourage you to learn more at www.h4hungry.org.

Wishing you and yours a secure and bountiful Thanksgiving holiday!

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

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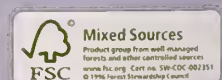
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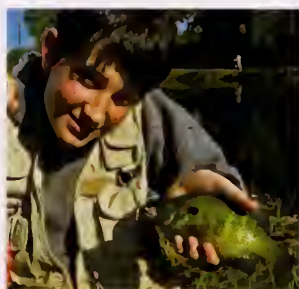
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NOVEMBER CONTENTS



About the cover:
As general firearms season opens, many will join a long tradition of hunting in Virginia and venture afield in pursuit of a whitetail. Last season was the best on record, and we expect a similar, strong showing this time around.
©John R. Ford



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MOUNTAIN

**A pair of
duck hunters,
a dog, and...
the mountains?**

by Tee Clarkson
photos by Eric Rutherford

Waders...check.
Shotguns...check.
Shells...check.

Duck calls...check. Ready to go, I left out of the basement door as I al-

ways do for hunting trips, hoisting my waders over one shoulder, my hunting bag over the other, carrying a gun case in each hand. This trip would be different though. This time I wasn't heading north to Delaware or Maryland. Not east to Tangier or Chincoteague. Not even south to Currituck Sound or Lake Mattamuskeet. With all the swamps and tidal marshes within a few hours by car, I was driving three hundred miles to the southwest corner of Virginia to hunt ducks in the mountains.

As the afternoon wore on, I passed Charlottesville, climbed over Afton, and wove down through

Waynesboro before merging onto 81 South. This was a route I usually assigned for smallmouth or trout, certainly not duck hunting. It seemed like a good weekend to try something new and different though. This was confirmed as I listened to the Arizona Cardinals beat the Eagles in the NFC championship game and move on to their first Super Bowl.

It started snowing just after I passed Roanoke, and while I did not want too much on the roads, the white stuff was a welcome sight. It rarely snows in Richmond anymore. Besides, a little snow could make for a good hunt in the morning. A few



MALLARDS

hours later I pulled off the highway into Abingdon and made my way to Eric Rutherford's house.

You never know what to expect when meeting a person for the first time, but I have found that when the common bond is a passion for duck hunting, things tend to gel pretty quickly. Meeting Eric was no exception. Within a few minutes we were enjoying venison stir fry with his wife, Holly, and his two-year-old daughter, Blair. Of course it did not take long for the conversation to turn



A few decoys can provide plenty of success on small waters.



to ducks and stories of the season's invariable ups and downs, of past failures, and of the hopes of future triumphs. Outside it kept on snowing.

Five a.m. came as early as it always does, with the same relief and excitement. I must feel like most hunting dogs when the wait is finally over and it's time to go to the field. Several inches of fresh snow had fallen during the night, which made my flatlander nerves jump a bit, but Eric assured me we would be able to get to his spot on the river without a problem.

Within an hour we were parked next to a dilapidated barn on top of a relatively steep hill. At least I would call it steep where I am from. We slipped into waders, grabbed guns and decoys, and proceeded to make our way down toward the river where we would set up and wait for dawn. The experience was surreal, the world in a wild, white silence but for the crunch of our boots on the fresh snow and the soft panting of Eric's dog. No rumbling motors or knee-deep mud to navigate. No cussing an outboard that won't start at 5:30 a.m. Hank, Eric's black lab,

loped alongside, old enough to know not to use up too much energy before a hunt, and young enough to hope we would need him. A light snow continued to fall.

Ultimately I broke the silence as we neared the river and I could hear the rushing of the water: "That wasn't a bad walk," I commented.

"Yeah, but we have to go back up when we are done," Eric replied.

A good point.

There was no need to rush things once we reached our spot, a shallow riffle, maybe a hundred yards below a soft bend in the small river. We had thirty minutes before legal shooting time and only a modest spread of decoys to toss out. After finding a downed tree to hide behind, we set a half-dozen mallards and a few black ducks in the little run that looked more suitable to trout fishing than to killing ducks, but Eric assured me he had seen close to 20 mallards loafing here the afternoon before. We hoped they would come back as we leaned against the tree along the bank and talked about his dog, Hank, and past hunts on this river, one of us asking every few minutes the most asked



Rarely is there a need for a permanent blind on a small river. Generally, plenty of natural cover exists to conceal a few hunters and a dog.

question prior to shooting time in duck blinds everywhere, "What time is it now?"

A guy recently queried me on the phone if I was a deer hunter. When I replied that I mostly hunted ducks, his response was, "Ahh ... one of those guys."



"Yes ... one of those guys," I said. He knew I must love cold, nasty weather in the winter, high tides that flood marshes, and wicked north winds. Eric is one of those guys too.

When shooting time arrived, we hushed and turned to the sky. Looking out over a spread of decoys, the snow beginning to pick up, hunkering behind a downed log, waiting on the birds and the whistle of wings, I was hard pressed to see how it could get much better than this, at least not until four mallards glided over our spread a few minutes later.

"Here we go," Eric whispered. I leaned in closer to the tree. He gave a short come-back call, but the birds had disappeared down the river and out of sight. In a minute a pair appeared just downriver from where we had seen them last vanish. They dropped straight down on us through the small hole in the trees above the water. Faintly I heard Eric say, "Take 'em," but my gun was already halfway to my shoulder. They were only ten yards when I fired the first shot from my over and under and, as strange as it may sound, they were a little too close. At least that is my excuse for missing the first shot. Fortunately, as they picked up I dropped one with my second, saving myself from total embarrassment.

Hank took off on command from Eric, who hadn't shot, and splashed through the shallow water along the bank to where the mallard lay dead in a small eddy. The snow was really coming down now.

A few minutes later two more mallards came swooping in low over the decoys and Eric dropped one. Throughout the morning we saw 20 or 25 birds, and where that might not be considered much in many places, it is plenty when they come to where you have set up. Most of them gave us a look or came in, and we took a handful. With the snow still falling I knew I would need to get on the road home soon, so we called it a morning around 9.

It was nice to only have a few decoys to pick up, but there was still the hike back up the hill I had not forgotten about. Whether it is wallowing



Fast moving, shallow water can make for some interesting retrieves, even for a veteran hunter.



Perhaps the nicest thing about hunting over a small spread is only having to pick up a few decoys when the day is done.

through mud or trudging up a steep hillside with a bag of decoys on one's back, it just wouldn't be duck hunting if it was easy. I turned toward the river one last time as we headed up the trail to the truck and, sure enough, two mallards appeared out of the snow and landed right in the riffle where we had set up. It was

comforting to know that mallards in the mountains are the same as they are everywhere else and that some things just never change. □

Tee Clarkson is an English teacher at Deep Run High School in Henrico Co. and runs Virginia Fishing Adventures, a fishing camp for kids: tsclarkson@virginiafishingadventures.com.



IT TAKES A POACHER

by Ken Perrotte

Bill Justice hung around with a rough crowd, folks who wouldn't think twice about pressing the muzzle of a cocked, loaded weapon against the back of your head while they searched you to make sure you were who you said you were.

Justice was a poacher and his "buddies" were poachers, many of whom were already convicted felons accustomed to a little gunplay.

Bill Stump was a game warden with the Department, known today as a "conservation police officer," who used inside information Justice obtained to put wildlife violators out of business.

Both are the same man.

Stump, a Honaker, Virginia, native who retired in October, 2008 after 34 years of service with DGIF, was among the most successful undercover operatives ever employed by Virginia. He participated in operations with code names such as "Bear Down, Triple-Edge, Meat Pot," and "SOUP" or, Special Operation to Uncover Poaching.

The work netted violators illegally hunting and selling venison to restaurants and bear parts to foreign buyers for food and medicine. His efforts also caught criminals killing protected birds for private display and transporting wild animals into and out of state for "hunts"—for food, medicinal purposes, and the highly lucrative pet trade. He even busted poachers using blasting caps to kill or stun fish.

"I used the undercover name Bill Justice for 24 years. I got numerous comments from court and criminal justice officials with reference to my choice of my covert last name. The most received comment was 'Justice at work,'" Stump said.

It is often pointed out that conservation police officers are the only law enforcement members of the state who can almost be assured that everyone they encounter is carrying a firearm or a knife, or both.

Routine operations for uniformed officers carry inherent risks, but the danger factor ratchets up exponentially when an officer submerges into the shadowy world of the lawless.

Left, Bill Stump early in career. Right, newspaper clippings of the day extol Stump's accomplishments before becoming a special agent.



JUSTICE FIT WORK



Stump said his undercover targets suspected him of being an officer several times, with some accusations more nerve-racking than others.

"One time, two individuals were driving me around the county showing me places where they had been killing a lot of deer illegally. We ended up on a dead-end dirt road. The driver stopped and turned the inside lights on. The passenger, who was a brother to the driver, turned and said, 'You are a g---d--- cop'."

"I retrieved a beer from a grocery bag in the back seat, popped the top and handed it to him and stated, 'Hell yes, I am the Chief of Police at Roanoke.' Luckily for me, they thought that was funny and laughed," Stump said.

"On another occasion, my second operation, five convicted felons held me down on the ground at gunpoint while they searched me for weapons and any type of I.D. that would implicate me as being an officer," he added.

Stump said the key to being able to handle such situations is to remain calm and have faith in your training and ability.

Love of Outdoors and a Flair for Acting

Stump grew up on a farm and enjoyed hunting, fishing, and trapping. "I was always an avid outdoorsman ... have always had a love for the outdoors," he said.

He was impressed by the work local game wardens and the DGIF did for sportsmen and landowners, and his father, uncles, and new bride encouraged him to apply for a job. His first application in 1973 was turned down, but he re-applied in 1974 and was selected.

Stump took an early liking to 'plainclothes' work, finding it rather easy and rewarding.

Extensive undercover work in 1984 brought numerous charges against deer poachers and sellers of wildlife in Bedford and Wythe counties. Stump said he came to realize

that the only way certain wildlife violators—real professional poachers, many of whom are already convicted felons—would ever be brought to justice was through undercover work.

"There's a lot of money to be made in the black market of illegal wildlife parts, from black bear gall bladders, which can bring as much as \$10,000 on the foreign market, to trophy deer heads and migratory waterfowl ... not to mention the fees guides charge for illegal hunts or fishing trips, whether it be on national parks or other prime hunting and fishing areas," he explained.

Stump spent 23 years in "deep cover" with covert credentials and many of his investigations yielded cases involving multiple defendants and hundreds of charges.

One operation Stump supervised operated out of a "storefront," and for nearly three years, the agent he was working with lived upstairs in an apartment and ran the store downstairs.

Game warden enforces law



Stump always alert

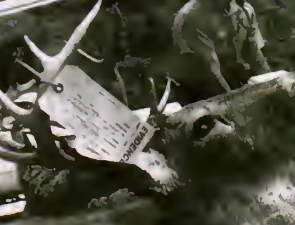
By Chuck Givens
For Sports Editor

"What is the solution to this? Well, I suppose the solution is to have more game wardens and the solution is to have more game wardens," said Stump, who is a game warden in the Shenandoah National Park area.

Stump, 41, is a game warden in the Shenandoah National Park area. He is a game warden in the Shenandoah National Park area. He is a game warden in the Shenandoah National Park area.

The Valley Beat

Eliton, Virginia, Thursday, August 24, 1994



Six charges

By Douglas Partridge
Staff Writer

For those that enjoy hunting, the news is bad. The Shenandoah National Park Game Warden has charged six poachers with illegal hunting.

The poachers were charged with illegal hunting, illegal hunting, illegal hunting, illegal hunting, illegal hunting, illegal hunting.

Poaching for profit and Va.'s loss

By Douglas Partridge
Staff Writer

Last Oct. 26 an undercover state game agent went to a deer farm and paid \$100 for the skin of a female bear.

The poacher was charged with illegal hunting, illegal hunting, illegal hunting, illegal hunting, illegal hunting, illegal hunting.





Evidence photos of bear gall bladder and paws.

"It was never hard for me to come up with a cover story," Stump said. "I've assumed covers such as coal operator from Southwest, sporting goods store owner, military surplus dealer, seafood dealer, bear hunter, kennel owner, and member of a consulting firm, to mention a few."

Blending in with poachers and gaining their trust also took a certain flair for acting, Stump explained. A top priority is to lose the law enforcement persona, the "in charge" look he says that all law enforcement officers project. With his burly stature, growing long hair and a bushy beard helped him lose the lawman role and blend in as an unemployed coal miner.

"You have to look the part you are playing—including personal looks, clothing, mannerisms, and actions. I learned early on not to play a part I couldn't back up. We were told in covert school not to play the part of a brain surgeon; you might be required to operate," Stump said.

"All undercover officers need some training in acting. You also need proper equipment: vehicles, boats, guns, clothing, etcetera," he added.

Beyond delivering an Oscar-nomination-worthy performance as a character actor, cultivating a poacher's confidence can sometimes take a couple of years before enough trust is built for him to bring you into his confidence.

Stump said having someone who will vouch for you usually cuts down on the time it takes to win someone's confidence.

The Criminal Mind

Criminals are humans and like to brag about their accomplishments. Stump said people he worked while undercover usually came around to sharing needed information because they liked to brag or confide about their criminal enterprise and techniques in someone they have come to trust. While he said he has seen some poachers reform and assist the government in future investigations, they rarely do so willingly.

"Usually, they're working off charges and hope to benefit themselves. Also as part of a plea agreement or probation requirements, they may be required to make per-

sonal appearances and discuss their past criminal activities," Stump said.

Sniffing out wildlife violators has brought him into close contact with all types of people.

"You encounter the best and the worst. Not all wildlife violators are convicted felons. Many are just regular people with a job and a family. Some lack a respect for the wildlife and that's when I come in," he said.

He admits actually coming to like some of the perpetrators, but quickly said he never let that interfere with his responsibility to enforce environmental and wildlife laws.

"They all came to like me—at least for a short period of time," he said wryly. "When you work undercover you have a way of going from 'best buddy' to 'enemy number one' real quick."

Stump said he has even had suspects he had been working covertly call him and warn him that "the man" was coming after they'd been arrested or charged.

"Sometimes they didn't think that I was the undercover officer right up till court date and I took the stand and began to testify. Some shock, right?" he quipped. □

Ken Perrotte is a King George County resident and the outdoors columnist for Fredericksburg's Free Lance-Star newspaper.



Image captured from VDGIF video surveillance tapes. Stump is on the right.



Image captured from VDGIF video surveillance tapes. Stump appears left. Below, Bill Stump remains active in investigative work.

Ready to Share Experiences

William (Bill) K. Stump spent the last 34 years of his 40-year career in public and military service with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, including 23 years with the Special Operations Unit where he was Assistant Special Agent in Charge.

Stump believes poaching, especially commercial poaching for monetary gain, is more prevalent than the average person or sportsman would suspect. Even with the sporadic publicity the subject receives, black market values for things such as black bear gall bladders escape most people's attention, he explained.

He sees undercover police work as key to nabbing the pros.

"The good part about undercover work is that you feel like you are really getting the people that are truly hurting the resource," he said. "The uniformed force is just not very effective against professional poachers. They just have too many things required of them to focus on a commercial investigation for a concentrated, extended time period."

Then, there is the "ego poacher"—a problem that Stump sees exacerbated by yearly contests for the person who kills the deer with the biggest rack, or the largest bear, or the largest fish. Still, some hunters just try to see how many wild turkeys they can kill in a year, he added.

Even non-hunters looking for trophies instead of animal parts used in folk remedies, exotic foods, or alternative medicines drive some of the market.

"Many people who don't hunt or fish are willing to pay high dollar for trophy wildlife to display in an office or den. Most people don't believe that there is much poaching on the national parks; yet, during my career I did two investigations into poaching of everything from bear, deer, and reptiles, to ginseng in Shenandoah National Park."

Busting poachers often takes a combination of high-tech gear and good, boots-on-the-ground police work. Underlying it all, though, is a dedication to see the job through, recognizing that for every 18- to 20-hour day spent in the field, another three to four days are spent on office work.

"There are long hours, adverse weather conditions, time away from family and friends, and hanging out with unsavory characters, but that is what it takes to be successful," Stump said.

"I supervised several individuals that thought they wanted to do undercover work, only to fade away after the first or second trip into the field," he added.

Hollywood-produced television shows aside, not every case can be slammed shut with some high-tech solution. Yet, Stump said he perceived that some courts and juries expect the agent to have hours of video or audio documenting his every move.

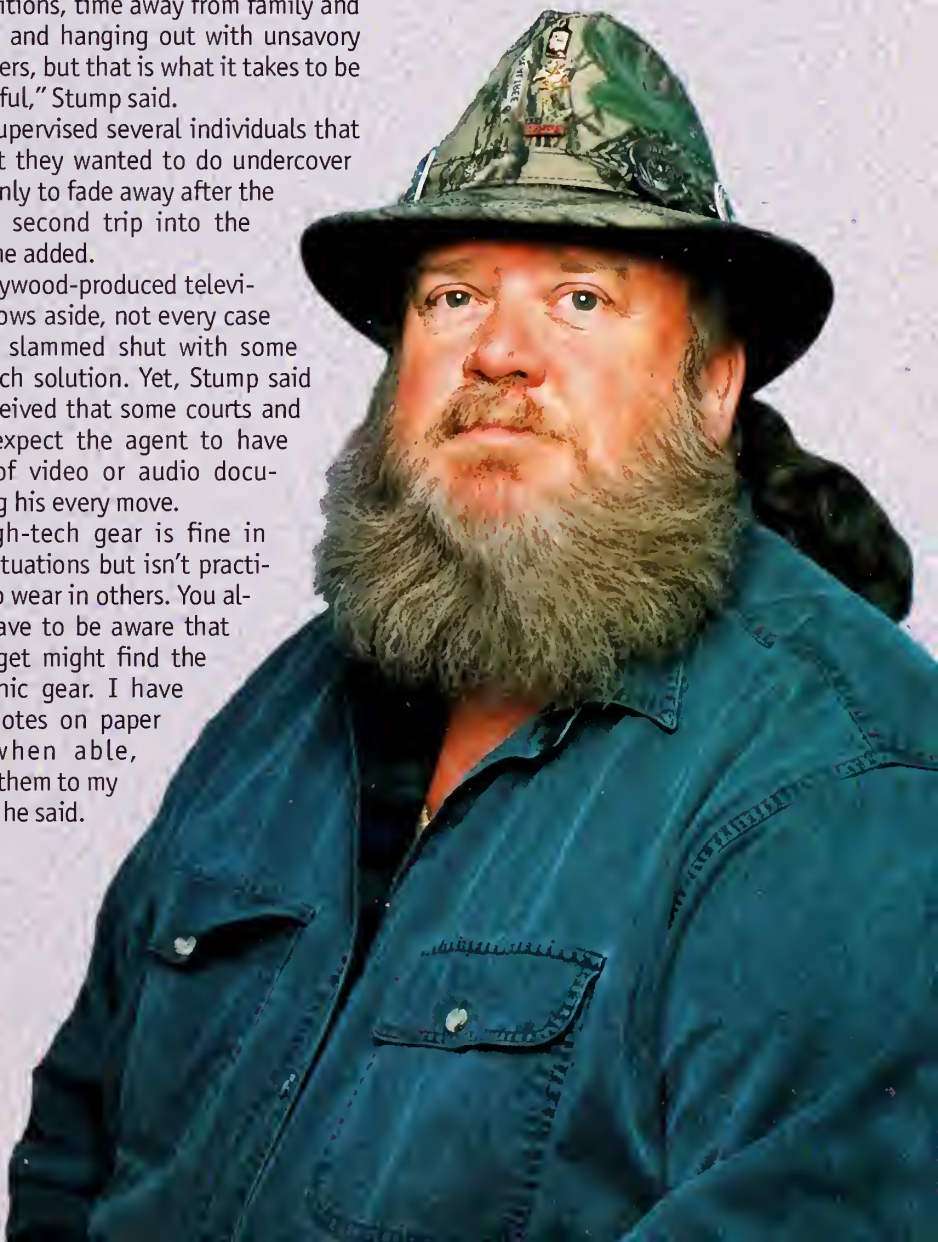
"High-tech gear is fine in some situations but isn't practicable to wear in others. You always have to be aware that the target might find the electronic gear. I have made notes on paper and, when able, mailed them to my office," he said.

Now, at the end of his career in public service, Stump reflects on both his uniformed and covert operations work, confessing he misses it along with the trained professionals who worked beside him.

Today, he runs a private company, William Stump & Associates, Ltd., (www.williamstump.com) that specializes in covert video surveillance systems, hidden cameras, and GPS tracking devices, many of which he helped design during his career as a special agent.

Also a licensed private investigator, Stump works electronic surveillance for corporations and various agencies.

Stump said he is always available to share his wildlife enforcement knowledge with young law enforcement officers as well as the public, with particular emphasis on educating others about the challenges that wildlife agencies face trying to enforce wildlife laws. □



Unveiling Nature Fish

essay and photos by Beau Beasley



Campers begin each morning with an hour of fly casting.

Like most six-year-olds, my daughter Maggie lives and breathes fairy tales. Perhaps the only thing she loves as much as a classic yarn is the outdoors: My nature girl can entertain herself for hours catching butterflies, digging holes in the ground, and watching the birds. In June Maggie's loves came together when she tagged along beside me for a few days at the 5th Annual Trout Unlimited Tri-State Conservation Camp at Graves Mountain Lodge in Syria, Virginia.

Kneeling on the banks of the Rose River, wildlife biologist Paul Bugas, with the Department, became the Pied Piper: "That's a black-nosed dace," he said, pointing down into a bucket. "That's a sculpin, and there's a stone fly. Stone flies require clean water, so seeing them is a really good sign of a healthy stream."

The students who were jostling each other to get closer to Bugas had just listened to his lecture earlier that morning. Finally the Pied Piper decided to relocate his class from streamside to the shade of a nearby tree so that more students could get in close.

Just moments before, members of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service had electro-shocked a portion of the Rose River and collected dozens of samples of various fish and insects. The aquatic 'prizes' were placed in buckets and then brought to Bugas for identification. He eventually separated them for counting and inspection. At times Bugas was pressed on all sides, as interested children eagerly peered into the buckets and vied to ply him with questions.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff shock a portion of the Rose River as campers look on.

al Wonders at Camp

Camp director Paul Kearney looked at Bugas and his cluster of students with a knowing smile. "It's the same thing every year," said Kearney with a grin. "Paul Bugas and the folks at DGIF do a great job of engaging these kids. Just look at them over there. You think those kids are that interested in their teachers and subject matter at school? I don't think so."

I glanced back toward the group and was surprised to see Maggie alongside Bugas. She had a crayfish in her hand and a look of wonder on her face. Like the older kids around her, she was listening with rapt attention to the Pied Piper of the Game Department introduce the aquatic wonderland he'd just unveiled. ■

Beau Beasley (www.beaubeasley.com) is director of the Va. Fly Fishing Festival and author of Fly Fishing Virginia: A No Nonsense Guide to Top Waters.



Seining the river and identifying aquatic insects weave education into fishing fun.

Interested in Attending?

Think your kids might enjoy conservation camp? Campers range in age from 13 to 17 and attend classes that cover a variety of topics such as hydrology, the effects of acid rain, erosion, and the impacts of invasive species. The week-long experience is hardly all work and no play, however: Campers also get to go fishing several times and learn how to tie flies. Each camper takes home a fly rod and reel outfit of their own at the end of the week.

The camper fee runs about \$600, which includes all meals and housing, as well as gear needed for classes. Some scholarships are available, and support also comes to the camp from organizations like Orvis, L.L. Bean, Dominion, and Fly Fishing Benefactors. **Registration begins in the spring.** For more information on how your child can attend the next TU Tri-State Conservation Camp, contact camp director Paul Kearney at (540) 229-0563 or go to www.tucamp.org.



Biologist Paul Bugas with DGIF is very popular with campers and counselors alike.



TU Conservation Camp has a reputation for making environmental education fun.



Time to Take a Kid Hunting

Virginia's late fall turkey season, of course

by Bruce Ingram

"There's been some jakes roosted on that point over there," motions 14-year-old Buddy Long of Fincastle. It is 7 o'clock, the morning after Christmas, and Buddy and his dad, Stanley, and I are climbing a Botetourt County mountainside, trying to reach a flat to the left of the point Buddy has indicated that young male turkeys have been using.

We two adults are, allegedly, taking Buddy hunting, but right now we are relying on him to accomplish one of the hardest aspects of fall turkey hunting—locating the birds before they fly down and head who knows where. The goal is to bust the birds off the roost in the early morning murk and then call them back in, as scattered jakes and jennies are much more vocal when separated from the flock.

Once we reach the point, a jake gobbles some 300 yards away and the elder Long and I ponder running toward him. Buddy, however, claims to have heard some hen yelps just 75 yards from us. Since Stanley and I haven't heard the hen yelping, we opt to move toward the jake, which, to our frustration, stops gobbling as soon as we arrive near that spot.

Buddy Long once again mentions those hen yelps, and the three of us head to the mountain crest where the youngster says he harked to the birds. I emit a "kee kee" on a

diaphragm, and the woods come alive with the assembly yelp of a flock hen, followed by jakes gobbling, jennies yelping, and fighting purrs from both sexes. By now, though, the flock has crossed a property boundary line, and we can't follow it. If only we had listened to Buddy earlier. A classic "out of the mouths of babes" situation.

Virginia's late four-week turkey season is an ideal period to introduce youngsters to the pursuit of turkeys and teach them the rudiments of the pastime, says Dave Steffen, forest wildlife program manager for the Department.

"With schools closed over Christmas break, the holidays are a



Stanley and Buddy Long take note of persimmons still clinging to the tree in late December. Persimmons are a valuable food source for Virginia turkeys.



©Bruce Ingram

Sound Makers

David White, who operates Fantomb Turkey Calls in Lynchburg, recommends three kinds of calls for young, or novice, fall turkey hunters.

- **Trough-type call.** Trough calls, says White, have a groove down their center, and all the individual has to do is slide a striker down the groove to create turkey talk. Different stroke lengths and amount of applied pressure create different sounds.
- **Box call.** By sliding the handle across the lips of a box, an individual can easily learn to create yelps, clucks, and purrs.
- **Push-pin.** Pull the pin back and forth and you've created yelps.

For more information on Fantomb Turkey Calls: www.fantomb.com or (877) FANTOMB.

Tips for Novice Hunters

Dave Steffen notes that the 12 gauge is the standard choice for turkey hunting, but if someone—child or adult—possesses a small frame, then the 20 gauge is a very acceptable option. The lighter, 20 gauge also serves well as a small game gun, and if a parent and child should encounter some squirrels, then they can opt to bag a silvertail or two.

Steffen labels the apprentice license as “a great concept” that basically serves to enable individuals new to hunting and who have not previously held a hunting license or taken a hunter education class to become introduced to the pastime. For more information, go to www.HuntFishVA.com or call (866) 721-6911.

wonderful time to take kids turkey hunting,” Steffen observes.

“Another good thing about hunting then is, if the weather is bad one day, a parent and child can wait until another day to go. Kids are also so busy these days and have so many activities planned that it’s often hard to find time to take them hunting during a routine Saturday.

“Yet another positive thing about going afield now is that there’s very little hunting pressure. The late muzzleloader season is still going on but, according to our statistics, well less than ten percent of the deer muzzleloader harvest takes place then, so there aren’t many deer hunters in the woods, either. Late December through early January is just a great time to take a hike into the winter woods, observing wildlife and nature, and hopefully coming across a fall flock.”

Steffen adds that another enticing aspect of fall turkey hunting is that it is an active pastime. Participants are always moving, calling, noting sign and, hopefully, eventually scattering a gang of birds. Only then do hunters typically set down, but there’s much to do even then with the calling and constant scanning of the woods.

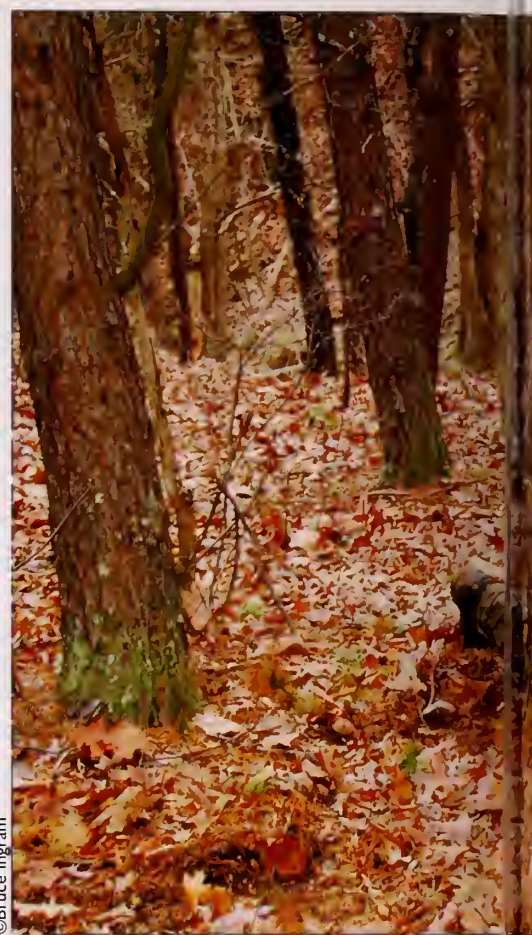
In fact, the inherent activity that defines fall turkey hunting is part of its charm.

“I just like being out in the woods hunting with my dad,” says Buddy Long when I ask him what he likes best about this day. “But my favorite part is busting up a gang of turkeys. It’s fun trying to call them in, too.”

Calling Tactics

In my opinion, late season birds are much more difficult to call in than their October and November counterparts. The jakes and jennies still “kee kee” (the lost call when flock members have been scattered) but they infrequently act as panic-stricken and as desperate to re-group as they do earlier in the autumn when they have been separated from the flock hen.

For example, during one of the three outings with the Longs this past late season, we came across a flock that had been busted as “kee kees”



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Fincastle's Stanley and Buddy Long enjoy a fall hunt in the Botetourt County woods.



Stanley Long points to fresh turkey scratching while on a late fall outing. Sign like this is among the best that turkey hunters can find.

were floating through the woods. We immediately set up and began responding with our own lost calls, but then an altercation broke out among the jakes. The aggressive young males began making fighting purrs toward each other and the sound of outraged gobbles filled the air.

We then heard the flock hen's assembly call—a long series of yelps designed to call her young in—but only the jennies responded, as the males continued to try to sort things out among themselves. Before long, the entire assemblage had drifted away from us, and the woods became absent of turkey talk.

This leads to another point: Flock dynamics are much different now. At some point the jakes, as they try to establish a pecking order among themselves, break away from the flock hen and form gangs of their own, which are led by the dominant male. If you come across a group consisting of the flock hen and jennies and scatter them, by all means continue to issue

kee kees, yelps, and clucks. But if you venture upon a gang of rowdy jakes you will be better served to sound off with gobbles, fighting purrs, and loud, obnoxious yelping. Even then, as our group found out, success is never certain.

Late Season Food Sources

Like the proverbial saying about advancing armies, fall turkeys do travel on their stomachs, and ascertaining what the birds are eating now is a fascinating aspect of the pursuit. For instance, this past season the oak crop was very spotty in much of Southwest and acorns had long since been consumed by December. Turkeys had largely abandoned the hardwood hollows.

The places where I found birds were among such soft mast food sources as wild grapes, persimmons, and greenbrier berries. I also noted scratching in white pine glades, overgrown thickets, and clearcuts—places that Virginia hunters don't

normally associate with turkeys but, obviously, areas the birds venture to this time of year.

During the last of our three excursions together, Stanley, Buddy, and I had set up near a field edge when we heard a flock walking through the woods toward us. We shouldered our shotguns, our respective pulses quickened, and the thought flashed through my mind that perhaps all three of us would punch a tag. But at the precise moment that the turkeys appeared, three deer ran into our midst, scattering the turkeys to points unknown.

Although we remained at the scatter point for nearly three hours, the birds never returned. One thing is certain, though. Buddy Long will return to the excitement of the late autumn woods next year and so will his dad and I. □

Bruce Ingram is the author of The James River Guide, The New River Guide, and The Shenandoah/Rappahannock Rivers Guide. Contact him at be_ingram@juno.com.



Buddy Long points out some turkey droppings to his dad.

eBird

and the *Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail*

essay and photos by Gail Brown

Monday: phones ring, cells chirp and copiers clunk. Binoculars nesting in discarded memos peek out from their aerie atop loosely stacked notebooks and appear to wink at you! Clearly, work won't work for you today. What you need is time with nature to help you refocus and fly right again. And to find the best locations to view Virginia's wildlife you know to click on the Department's Web site and wind your way to Virginia's Birding and Wildlife Trail (VBWT).

Completed in 2004, the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail links over 670 wildlife viewing locations in a contiguous chain of 65 loops across the Commonwealth. The VBWT has become a valuable resource not only to citizens wanting to get close to nature, but to the staff at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) and communities

as well. For communities with sites on the trail, protecting and promoting their wild spaces helps attract tourists and promotes economic growth. DGIF comes closer to achieving its environmental goals when citizens become aware of their area's natural resources and how those resources can positively impact their lives. *Discover Our Wild Side*, a comprehensive VBWT guide, provides directions to the sites, descriptions of the individual loops, and maps of the trail.

School environmental clubs like the one at Cooper Elementary School for Technology will find that eBird enhances their activities.



Discover Our Wild Side, the VBWT guide, helps nature enthusiasts plan their wildlife viewing experiences.

To purchase a copy of this resource go to <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt>

This summer the potential for enhancing the value of the trail took a giant leap forward when all sites on the VBWT were linked with eBird, an on-line bird monitoring program created by Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. Now all VBWT site web pages have a link to the eBird page for that site. The Virginia eBird portal (<http://ebird.org>) allows participants to access information about birds observed at each site as well as to add what they have seen. VBWT sites are identified in eBird by their official name and number—the same information seen on signage when on the trail. All this makes eBird a useful tool for Virginians wanting to use the trail and document their observations. While personal sightings become part of the larger record, individual identities can be protected. Thus, citizens using eBird can maintain their own records electronically and, at the same time, contribute to a universal database with unlimited potential to improve conservation efforts in the field of ornithology. For Virginians who love nature and want to help, eBird and the VBWT offer an opportunity to be part of something bigger than any of us can achieve alone.

So here's how all this can work for you: You can go to the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Web site and access information about the VBWT. There you will find the best places to observe wildlife of all kinds—including your favorite birds. From there, you can venture to the eBird page for that site to see what others have seen there! If you wish, you can document what you see. All will work for you—your spirits will

soar!—unless you get careless and turn off those noisy machines as you leave. Someone's sure to hear the quiet and come looking for you. And how would you explain the backpack and binoculars? It's not even Friday yet. □

Gail Brown is a retired teacher and school administrator.

The partnership between eBird and the VBWT makes it easy for Virginians to report and access information about bird sightings.



Be Wild! Live Secretive



Dismal Swamp Southeastern Shrew

story and illustrations
by Spike Knuth

We seldom see them but we often see the results of their habits. They are small and secretive, but very numerous. These are the shrews, which are mouse-sized creatures that are among the smallest of our mammals, and the rodents which include mice, rats, voles, and lemmings.

Shrews have a metabolism so high that they are required to eat constantly, sometimes twice their weight in food each day, while still managing to sleep, nurse babies, and avoid dangers. A shrew's heart may beat as many as 700 times a minute; 1,200

when stressed. They have poor eyesight but excellent hearing and a good sense of smell and touch. Shrews live life in the fast lane. Their constant search for food makes them vulnerable to predators and they rarely survive past one year. Owls, snakes, wild carnivores, and cats and dogs are their primary predators.

Mice, rats, voles, and lemmings are gnawing mammals with chisel-like incisors. Active most of the year in forests, fields, bogs, and marshes, they build nests out of plant material in burrows or under rocks or logs. Most are preyed upon by owls, hawks, snakes, and other mammals, but they are very prolific breeders and can sustain heavy predation. Among some species, populations are cyclical and years of plenty are followed by years of scarcity.

A number of shrews and rodents in Virginia are rare and endangered. In many cases, very little is known about them because so few have been located for study. Most have lost much habitat due to human disturbance, changes in land use, and degradation or fragmentation of their respective homes. Many now exist only in scattered, isolated pockets; among them, the species listed here.

Dismal Swamp
Southeastern Shrew
(*Sorex longirostris fisherii*)

The Dismal Swamp shrew is a geographical variant of, and generally a bit larger than, the common southeastern shrew (*Sorex longirostris longirostris*). It is a duller red-brown with more brownish gray under parts.

Like other shrews, the Dismal Swamp shrew has a long, pointed nose, tiny ears, small beady eyes, and a dense, plush fur. It inhabits the edges of canebrakes and thickets of blackberry, honeysuckle, poison ivy, and holly around old logs, under leaves, grasses, and other ground humus.

Active both day and night, it feeds on spiders, crickets, worms, slugs, snails, salamanders, and even larger mice and voles. Shrews nest in burrows of their own making or of other mammals, under or in logs or stumps. Females bear two litters annually of one to six young.

Dismal Swamp shrews are classified as a threatened species. Their small, scattered populations are widely distributed throughout suitable coastal plain habitat from southeastern Virginia into eastern North Carolina.



Northern Water Shrew

Wild! Grow Wild!

Little Fur Balls

Northern Water Shrew (*Sorex palustris*)

The American water shrew is the largest of the eastern long-tailed shrews, measuring about six inches. Its fur is glossy black-gray above and silvery gray below. It is almost always found near water, where it has the ability to dive and swim. When it dives, air bubbles trapped in its fur give it buoyancy. Its hind feet are large and hairs along the sides and toes serve as paddles. It has been observed walking on the bottom of a stream as well as on the surface.

These shrews live in the boreal forests of Canada and the northern United States, extending south through the Appalachian Mountains. They inhabit the bogs and banks of rocky, cold, fast-flowing mountain streams that are flanked by moss-covered rocks, rhododendron, yellow birch, or hemlock. Here they nest in tunnels or burrows, or under logs and rocks. Caddis flies, stone flies,

mayflies, fungi, herbaceous plants, fish eggs, and small fish make up their diets.

Fossil evidence indicates they were more widespread and numerous in high elevations, but only a remnant population has been found at a few sites in Bath and Highland counties. They are considered endangered in Virginia.

Long-tailed Shrew (*Sorex dispar*)

Also known as the rock shrew, this little mammal is slate-gray above, with paler undersides and a very long tail. Very little is known but its habits are thought to be similar to the more common, smoky shrew. It inhabits the rocky slopes in mixed hardwood and conifer forests, residing in rock

crevices, natural tunnels and burrows, or under moss-covered logs in moist, shaded coniferous forests.

These shrews are probably active day and night, feeding on insects, beetles, centipedes, and spiders. They likely breed from May through mid-August, with litters of three to five young each.

The long-tailed shrew's distribution is restricted to the Appalachian Mountains of western Virginia.



Pungo White-footed Mouse



Long-tailed Shrew



Cotton Mouse

Cotton Mouse
(*Peromyscus gossypinus*)

The cotton mouse is similar to the white-footed mouse but slightly larger. It, too, has large eyes and big ears. Its fur is dark gray to tawny-brown above and white below. Cotton mice are nocturnal, good climbers, and active year round. They favor wooded bottomlands, river floodplains, swamps, vine thickets, cane patches, cliffs, and caves. Here they are found around stumps, logs, rock piles, stone walls, and old buildings.

Breeding takes place from February into August, with several litters averaging four young. They feed on the same foods as the white-footed mouse and often compete

Pungo White-footed Mouse
(*Peromyscus leucopus easti*)

This medium-sized mouse has large eyes and measures 5.5 to 8 inches. Its colors vary from red-brown to gray-brown above, with a white belly and feet. Brushy habitats in mixed hardwood-conifer upland forests or in wooded river bottoms are favored. The Virginia variant, the Pungo white-footed mouse inhabits wax myrtle and bayberry thickets behind the sand dunes of coastal areas.

These mice are active all year but mostly at night. They nest in hollow logs, stumps, burrows, and old, low-hanging bird nests, and are adept at climbing. Several litters are born each year. They feed on seeds, berries, fruits, tree buds, insects, spiders, earthworms, millipedes, and centipedes.

In Virginia, the Pungo white-footed mouse is found from Cape Henry to First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach.

with and displace it in lowland areas.

Cotton mice are found mainly in the Coastal Plain of the southeast. Their status is presently undetermined due to lack of sufficient data.

Southern Bog Lemming
(*Synaptomys cooperi*)

This small, short-legged vole with a short tail has a relatively large head, chubby body, blunt nose, and shaggy fur. It has brown-gray upper parts and gray-white underparts. Bog lemmings are primarily nocturnal and active all year. Like other voles they form surface and underground runways.

Two forms of the bog lemming live in Virginia: one in the southeastern reaches was considered endangered; another more common form in western Virginia. *Synaptomys c. helaletes* is found in a variety of habitats in and near the Dismal Swamp, ranging from damp, boggy clearings to stands of young loblolly pines.



Southern Bog Lemming

Synaptomys c. stonei is found west of the Blue Ridge in the river flood plains and often in growths of horse tail. Bog lemmings also inhabit pastures, grassy forest clearings, power line rights-of-way, and spruce forests among moss-covered boulders.

They build nests of a variety of plant materials, placed in grass clumps or in above- or below-ground runways. Young are born mainly during the warmer months. Several litters a year, usually of three or four, are born. Recent findings indicate the *S.c. helaletes* is not endangered.

Southern Rock Vole (*Microtus chrotorrhinus*)

The southern rock vole is very rare in Virginia, known from only a few locations in Bath County and one in Highland County. Similar to the common meadow vole found throughout Virginia, the rock vole was never collected in the state until the mid-'80s.

It is a medium-sized vole that is brown above with gray-white undersides. The sides of its snout are yellow to orange-rufous in color, and it is often called the yellow-nosed or orange-nosed vole.

Rock voles live among rocks and logs close to streams, springs, and seeps in mature, quiet forests of mixed hardwoods and conifers. In some instances they can be found in fresh clear-cuts or open, boulder-strewn fields adjacent to forests. They create a network of runways beneath leaf litter and among rocks, and are active any time of the day. Rock voles feed on roots, fresh shoots, grasses, buds, fungi, and berries such as blueberries and bunch berries. Little is known about their reproductive habits.

This vole is classified as endangered in Virginia, and similar to the northern water shrew described above, forces that dry up or warm up its habitat can be devastating.

Alleghany Wood Rat (*Neotoma magister*)

Also called the pack rat or trade rat, the Alleghany wood rat is a native rat that resembles a big mouse. Measuring 12 ¼ to 17 inches and weighing 6 to 12 ounces, it has large eyes, long whiskers, and soft, brown-gray fur with a whitish underside, including its tail.

It favors caves, cliffs, wet woodlands, old buildings, and rocky outcroppings. Fruits, berries, seeds, nuts, plants, and insects comprise its diet. Wood rats are known for the habit of collecting shiny pieces of metal such as spoons, bottle caps, nails, or pieces of glass, rags, plastic, and other discarded items. Often they'll leave a pebble, acorn, or pine cone in place of an item they take, presumably items they were carrying when the bright objects were discovered.

The wood rat is found in just about every mountainous county of Virginia. □

Spike Knuth is an avid naturalist and wildlife artist. For over 30 years his artwork and writing have appeared in Virginia Wildlife. He is a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.

Special thanks to Dr. John Pagels and Dr. Nancy Moncrief, who reviewed the text.

Be Wild! Live Wild! Grow Wild! is a regular feature that highlights Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, which is designed to unite natural resources agencies, sportsmen and women, conservationists, and citizens in a common vision for the conservation of the Commonwealth's wildlife and habitats in which they live. To learn more or to become involved with this program visit: www.bewildvirginia.org.



Alleghany Wood Rat



Southern Rock Vole

HUNTING INCIDENTS,



THEN AND NOW

by Sgt. David L. Dodson

Back in the October, 1979 issue of this magazine, Captain James N. Kerrick and Dr. Peter Bromley reviewed the quantity and causes of hunting-related shooting incidents (HRSIs) in Virginia for the 16-year period between July 1, 1961 and June 30, 1977. Their article was titled, "Are You a Defensive Hunter?" Much has changed since that time, with the introduction of mandatory blaze orange in 1987 and hunter education in 1988, but one thing has not: HRSIs have always been avoidable, with the application of a few, simple safety precautions.

Compared to many other sporting activities, hunting was safe in the past and is still safe today. The rate of HRSIs in the 1979 study was 14.9 per 100,000 licensed hunters. The rate of fatalities was much lower, at 2.5 per 100,000. However, there has been a significant improvement. During the last five years, the rate of HRSIs had dropped to 12.3 per 100,000, with a fatality rate of 1.2 per 100,000.

What caused the positive change? The issue is complex, and it is difficult to determine all possible causes. One primary difference is the mandatory use of blaze orange during the firearms deer season. The first deer season after the blaze orange law was enacted in 1987 was also the first on record in which no hunter was mistaken for game and shot by another hunter.

Since 1987, blaze orange has been required for hunting during any deer season in which the use of modern firearms is allowed. HRSIs have increased slightly for some types of hunting, especially where blaze orange is not commonly worn. During the 1960 to 1977 period, the percentage of incidents involving

Dwight Dyke

turkey hunters was 9%. During the period 2004-2009, the percentage had increased to 13%. Turkey hunting has become much more popular since the late 1970s, with a corresponding increase in the percentage of turkey hunting incidents.

Even more dramatic is the change involving muzzleloaders. There were no HRSIs involving muzzleloaders from 1960 to 1977. There was no early special season for muzzleloader hunters at that time, and the traditionalists who used these guns were relatively few in number. Since that time, changes in design have made this type of firearm much easier to learn to use. A special two-week deer season prior to the modern firearm season also helped to make these guns much more popular. By the 2004-2009 period, muzzleloaders were used in 13% of all incidents.

"Mistaken for game" incidents are also much less common today because of the use of blaze orange, but two-party HRSIs still occur. One of the most common types of incident during the past five years involves failure to plan and keep shots within a safe zone of fire. More than half of all two-party incidents involve a hunter shooting at a deer or some other game bird or animal, and then striking another hunter beyond the target. Fifty-nine of 98 HRSIs in the 2004-09 period were of this type. A typical description of the incident reads, "The hunter shot three times at a deer as it crossed between him and his hunting companion, striking the victim with several buckshot pellets."

During the period from 1960 to 1977, treestand use was much rarer than it is today. Most stands were home-made. Records of treestand injuries were not kept until 1992, but since that time, this type of incident has become one of the most common. During the period from 2004 to 2009, there were a total of 79 reported treestand injuries, compared to 163 firearms incidents. That is about 30% of the total. Four of the treestand incidents were fatal. It is suspected that many more such injuries occur, but are not reported. Almost all serious tree-

stand incidents may be avoided, simply by wearing a good fall restraint device whenever leaving the ground. The only recommended fall restraint device is a full-body harness. The best of these meet Treestand Manufacturers Association (TMA) or OSHA standards. Older styles of harnesses and belts can cause injury or suffocation, and should not be used.

In 1988, all hunters from 12-15 years of age, as well as any other hunter who had never purchased a hunting license, were required to complete a basic hunter education course prior to buying a hunting license. As more and more new hunters have completed the course, there has been a gradual reduction in the overall number of HRSIs. Today, most hunters under 40 years of age are hunter education graduates, and the rate of incidents is substantially lower.

Since July 1, 2008, an Apprentice Hunting License also has been available to new hunters. Apprentice license holders are permitted to hunt without taking the hunter education course, but must be accompanied and supervised by a licensed adult. Over 5,000 apprentice licenses were sold in the first year of availability, and no apprentice hunters have been involved in an HRSI.

♦ ♦ ♦

What can all hunters do to become even safer? Obviously, a hunter education course is a good start. It's a great way to improve firearm safety habits that have deteriorated over time. For veteran hunters, such a course can "tune up" their behavior so that they can set a good example for those around them. Young hunters, especially, are quick to mimic the actions of those they respect.

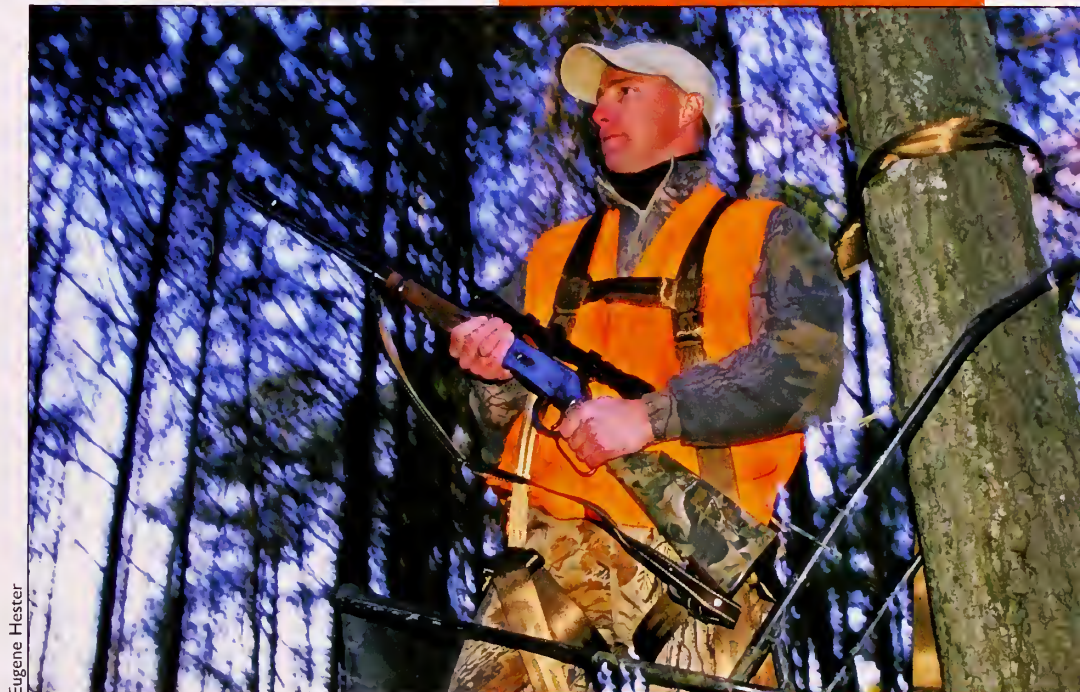
Over the years, the fundamentals of firearm safety have not changed. To be safe, you must, at a minimum:

- ♦ **Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.**
- ♦ **Control the muzzle. Always keep it pointed in a safe direction.**
- ♦ **Be sure of your target and beyond.**

In addition, wear blaze orange. If you hunt from a treestand, use a full-body safety harness from the moment you leave the ground.

Following these rules will help to keep your hunting experience safe and enjoyable, the way it should be.

Sgt. David Dodson serves as the hunter education coordinator for the state.



Eugene Hester



When it comes to “style,” my hunting partner leaves a lot to be desired. His plodding, loping demeanor may have served him well on a basketball court years ago, but he gets winded very quickly these days and seems to sweat a lot even on a cool day’s hunt. Dogs like me, however, are loyal to their hunting partners. You don’t hear *us* saying things like, “Ol’ Jones just doesn’t seem to have the drive he used to... might be time to look for a new kid to break in.”

For the most part, bird hunting dogs and their humans seem to get along pretty well. Maybe it’s because bird hunting dogs and bird hunting humans work together in the form of a partnership, each using their inherent skills to perform a task that achieves a mutual goal. Dogs hunting with other dogs in a pack often work in conjunction with each other in the same way. It doesn’t matter if there are both female and male dogs on the hunt; every member of the pack knows that the main goal is to bring home dinner. You humans, on the other paw, just can’t seem to stay focused—especially if there is an assortment of males and females along. Some of you want to form partnerships; others, relationships. Take it from a dog that has seen a lot of human behavior: Partnerships and relationships are *not* the same thing.

I believe humans have a great deal of difficulty figuring out the whole alpha dog thing. With dogs, there is one alpha male and one alpha female, and every dog in the pack knows where everyone in the pack stands. If not, they learn *tout de suite* (for all you poodle lovers out there). And unless

he is feeling mighty sure of himself, no dog messes with the alphas and what belongs to the alphas. Having an alpha dog establishes order in a pack. Order often translates into pack survival. Humans need to understand their role as the alpha to their pup and how to establish their alpha status. Some humans are naturally born alphas. Some aren’t. This is when you call in a *substitute* alpha—a good trainer.

Now some of you may be saying to yourself, “I’ve read dog books. I can train ol’ Blinker myself!” Well, that may be true, but first ask yourself a few questions like, “How good do I want my bird dog to be?” and, “How much patience and time do I have to train a dog?” It might be a good idea to let your alpha female and your kids answer the second question.

If all you want is a dog to retrieve a tennis ball, you can handle that yourself. If you want a hunting partner that obeys commands, retrieves to hand, and knows how to behave in the field or blind, you should think long and hard about getting a good trainer.

Training your dog yourself may be like teaching your child how to play the piano—although you have never had a lesson. You might be able to do it, but it will be an extremely frustrating experience for the both of you. Every dog has its own personality and an experienced trainer has developed a number of dogs and, therefore, should recognize a dog’s emotional traits and quirks quicker than you do. A professional trainer should also know the proper amount of discipline your pup needs, and

apply a small amount of correction to a “softer” dog and be firmer with a more headstrong one.

Many trainers do not want to take a dog until it is a least six months old, so in the meantime, take your puppy to a local obedience class where both of you can learn the basics. If your dog already knows how to sit, stay, and come, a professional trainer won’t have to waste his time and your money teaching your dog the basics and can focus on the hunting and retrieving part of training much quicker.

You still may be asking yourself at this point, “Why should I listen to a dog?”

I get that a lot. Here is a simple test to see if you have what it takes to be considered even a good dog trainer. Take your 7-year-old son to a candy store at the beach—the old-fashioned kind with the candy in half-barrels with a giant spoon. Have him heel at your side and tell him to stay. Then leave him. Fifteen minutes later, peek in the window and see what he’s doing. If he’s got a big spoon in his hand, you need a professional trainer.

Keep a leg up,
Luke

Luke is a black Labrador retriever who spends his spare time hunting up good stories with his best friend, Clarke C. Jones. You can contact Luke and Clarke at www.clarkecjones.com.



Find Game is an interactive Web-based map viewer designed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to provide better and more current information about hunting land location and access in Virginia. *Find Game* allows users to map hunting areas by location and/or by game species, along with hunting quality by species, land manager contact information, site description, facilities available, access information and associated Web links. To learn more about *Find Game*, visit www.HuntFishVA.com/hunting/findgame.

A Duck Hunter's Journal

by Tee Clarkson

November 20, 2008

A while back I was lucky enough to be in a good duck lease. Like anywhere, you could get skunked on a day when the weather, the tide, and the birds didn't cooperate, but it was also the kind of place that could give up a three-man limit of mallards, pintails, and black ducks if the waterfowling stars were correctly aligned. I hunted that leased marsh nearly every day I went out, for three years.

When we lost the lease a few years ago, I was devastated. Where would I hunt? I had no choice but to channel my disappointment into something constructive, looking for a new place to pursue ducks. The process has been difficult, time consuming, and frustrating but, at times, extremely rewarding.

There is public hunting in Virginia for ducks, but it is not like the public hunting in Utah, Colorado, and Idaho where I spent most of my twenties. There, a little scouting and a handful of decoys could often lead to a limit of mallards with plenty of time left to make it to the local diner before they quit serving breakfast. A day like that on public property in Virginia is a little more difficult to come by.

I have learned over the last few years, if you are going to find a good spot to hunt ducks in Virginia, you are most likely going to find it on your own, or else you have some pretty darn good friends who are confident you are not the kind of guy that goes flappin' his gums in public about where he has been seeing ducks. Most of the really good marshes and swamps are tied up in leases that are difficult to get in and, in many cases, even more difficult to afford. The key then lies in finding that out-of-the-way, undiscovered little gem of a duck hole that you have all to yourself—something much easier said than done.

It requires a sort of eternal optimism, trying to find a good duck hole. That, and a lot of patience, persistence, and desire. One needs to be willing to scour satellite images and property records, knock on doors, and make a lot of phone calls, all the while knowing that most of that work is entirely in vain.

It's a constant search for that "sweet spot" that is both affordable and accessible and where, at least occasionally, the mallards swarm like late-summer mosquitoes at dusk. I haven't found that one spot yet, but believing it is out there is the hope I hang on to when the alarm sounds at 3:30 a.m. in mid-January and I head down the road to check out a new beaver pond or try a marsh where a buddy swears he limited out in high school. Usually it doesn't pan out, but every now and again all the hard work pays off and I am rewarded with a decent bag.

I believe it's important to never assign a value to a hunt based on the number of birds killed, but the days we get skunked have a tendency to fade from memory a little more quickly than the others. It's hard not to feel a little better with a brace of birds hanging over your shoulder, walking out of a new duck spot, knowing you worked mighty hard to find it.





Journal

2009-2010 Outdoor Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, for current information and registration on workshops go to the "Upcoming Events" page on our Web site at www.HuntFishVA.com or call 804-367-7800.

November 6: Virginia Wildlife and Birding Trail 5th Anniversary Celebration, "The Link," 12018 Lee Hwy., Sperryville, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. For more information, contact Jeff Trollinger at jeff.trollinger@dgif.virginia.gov.

November 7: Shenandoah Audubon's 9th Birding Festival, Jim Barnett Park, Winchester. Contact Judy Hagan at hagansan@yahoo.com for more information.

November 14: Firearms deer season opens

December 4: *Turning a New Leaf*, Washington, DC. A conference for landscaping professionals to promote and learn about sustainable landscaping and development practices. For more information, visit www.ChesapeakeLandscape.org or call (443) 482-2156.

January 30, 2010: Winter Wildlife Festival, Virginia Beach. For more information, contact Jeff Trollinger at jeff.trollinger@dgif.virginia.gov. □

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by Beth Hester

The Armchair Birder: Discovering the Secret Lives of Familiar Birds

by John Yow
2009 The University of North Carolina Press
www.uncpress.unc.edu
Hardcover with black and white illustrations

The more I find out, the more I want to know; there is no end to the mystery and wonder of bird behavior...the professionals have done the legwork, and more power to them. As an armchair birder I accept a humbler role: if I can't paint like Audubon, maybe I can put his pictures in new frames."

—John Yow

You know how it is with bird watching: You casually put out one or two humble feeding stations, you invest in a moderately priced pair of binoculars, and maybe you grab hold of a legal pad to jot down what you see. Then, before you know what hit you, you're in the market for bird baths, Nijer seed, Sibley field guides, and numerous other avian accessories.

Author and editor John Yow started out pretty much the same way, hanging up a few feeders around his rural Georgia home, and hoping for the best. Eventually, Yow began to encounter a variety of woodland birds he'd previously seen only in books, and he became so fascinated by bird behavior that he began to document, season by season, the antics and activities of the birds that came his way.

The Armchair Birder is not a field guide per se; it's more a series of musings and meditations on the seasonal ways of his feathered companions. From his country perch, Yow shares his amusement at the handsome yet greedy cedar waxwings who, when in an inebriated state from gorging on overripe fruits and berries, have to 'sleep it off' before they can be on their way. He is amazed at the fledgling habits of the chimney swift and their spectacular aerial acrobatics. Through Yow's eyes we come to appreciate the ominous turkey vulture, and its necessary place in the web of life.

Whether you favor random dips into the book, or prefer to follow Yow systematically through the seasons, you will be sure to learn something new about the 42 species of birds that can be seen right outside your own window. □



What do you mean, "What am I doing?" This is opening day of deer hunting, isn't it?

Quail Initiative Launched



by Marc Puckett

Like much of the country, Virginia has witnessed tough times for Bobwhite quail. However, there are still areas of the state where quail are holding their own, even showing improvement. Our highest quail densities remain in Tidewater, generally east of I-95. Pockets of the Eastern Shore also still support good quail numbers.

A new Quail Action Plan (QAP) was endorsed by our board of directors in February 2009 and the Department is excited to be moving forward with this initiative. Many things can be accomplished at low cost to promote quail conservation. The new action plan, the Upland Gamebird Trail, and all other things quail can be found at: www.dgif.virginia.gov/quail/. This site is designed to help landowners conduct their own quail research and develop their own management plans.

Central to the success of the QAP is the idea of working with communities to develop concentrations of quail habitat we are calling "quail quilts." The idea behind

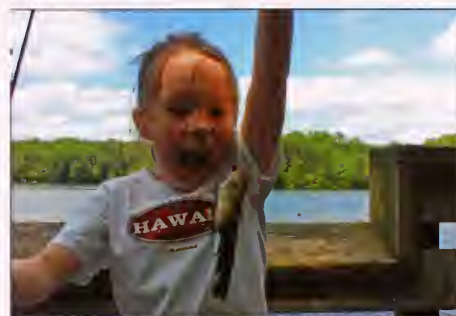
a quail quilt is that people come together, each bringing a piece of land that in and of itself may not be large enough to help, but sewn together with others nearby, forms a habitat quilt for the landscape. Each quilt will have a locally led Quail Recovery Team responsible for overseeing and implementing on-the-ground management practices. Our staff and partners will provide support, including information about financial assistance to get the work done. Our motto will be, "We'll go out of our way to help communities willing to go out of their way for quail." Landowners can become a part of this quail recovery effort by joining the Quail Management Assistance Program.

Working together, we will build support and appreciation for early-succession habitats, a habitat type that does not receive the respect it deserves. These habitats are not only important to quail, but to pollinating insects, songbirds, small mammals, and many other species. According to Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, 26% of the birds listed as Tier 1 species (those species of greatest conservation need) depend on early-succession habitats!

Twenty-two conservation organizations have signed on to this effort and operate as the Virginia Quail Council, shown here. Formed in May 2008, the council serves as a forum for discussion among early-succession habitat enthusiasts and enables partnerships to advance related research, implementation, and educational projects.

For more information about quail management in Virginia, contact Marc Puckett at: marc.puckett@dgif.virginia.gov or Jay Howell at: jay.howell@dgif.virginia.gov. □

Announcing the Kids 'n Fishing Photo Contest Winners!



Sessily, age 7



Anthony, age 3

Thanks to everyone who participated this year. Thanks also to our partners, Shakespeare and Green Top Sporting Goods, who awarded prizes to the top 3 winners in each age category. We greatly appreciate their support.

To view all the winning entries, go to: www.dgif.virginia.gov/kidsnfishing/2009/winners.asp.



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During a recent "Stewardship Virginia" kick-off event, Secretary of Natural Resources L. Preston Bryant, Jr. and Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Robert S. Bloxom donned their work boots to help plant a tree at the site of the new Natural Resources buildings of the Virginia State Fair in Doswell. Volunteers from the region planted other native trees, shrubs, and flowers that day, which are intended to serve as interpretive exhibits. Signs that explain the benefits of landscaping with native plants and the importance of providing habitat for nectar-loving insects will be erected.



Sally Mills

The 2010 *Virginia Wildlife* Calendar

Is Now Available

It's once again time to purchase a Virginia Wildlife calendar—a thoughtful holiday gift that's still a bargain at **\$10 each.**

As always, the calendar features spectacular photography and useful information to the outdoors enthusiast, including wildlife behavior, hunting seasons, favorable hunting and fishing times, state fish records, and more!

***Quantities Are Limited,
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To pay by VISA or MasterCard, you may order online at www.HuntFishVA.com on our secure site. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.



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by Ken and Maria Perrotte

Dining In

Stuffed Wild Turkey Breasts

Lucky enough to have tagged a spring gobbler or have a wild turkey breast or two in the freezer from a successful fall hunt? Here are a couple of suggestions that make creative use of the flavorful breast meat. The stuffing helps keep the breast moist. And while cider sauces and cranberry relishes might fool you into thinking these meals need to be reserved for the holidays, these dishes warm up a table any season.

Wild Turkey Breast Stuffed with Cheese & Apples

- Boneless, skinless turkey breast
- 1 tablespoon olive oil or oil spray
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon poultry seasoning (ramp up flavors to whatever suits your taste)
- 1 egg, beaten or $\frac{1}{4}$ cup yolkless eggs
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups bread crumbs
- 1 large or 2 small McIntosh apples sliced and cored
- $\frac{1}{4}$ pound sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Parchment paper to line small baking dish

Slice a horizontal pocket in the breast. Spray or brush one external side of the breast with oil and dust with half the flour and your favorite poultry seasoning. Brush exterior with egg and coat with bread crumbs. Turn the breast over so coated side is on bottom and place on parchment paper in a baking dish. (A tight fit in the baking dish helps ensure stuffing stays inside the pocket as it cooks.) Stuff apple and cheese slices into pocket. Coat the top and sides as you did the bottom and dot with pats of butter. Bake at 350° for about 55 minutes or until meat temperature reaches 165° . Breasts from a small turkey will obviously take less time to cook. Let rest 10 min. before slicing. Serve topped with cider sauce.

Cider Sauce

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup turkey stock (boil those turkey bones and tougher leg parts) or chicken broth
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup apple cider
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sherry
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- Dash of nutmeg
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch dissolved in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cold water
- Salt and pepper to taste

Mix liquids and sugar in a saucepan over medium high heat and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 5 min. Add nutmeg. Thicken with cornstarch and season with salt and pep-

per to taste. Can be made ahead of time and re-heated. For a sweeter sauce, add more sugar; for more savory flavor, sprinkle in some thyme and sage while sauce is simmering.

Wild Turkey Breast Cornbread Rollup

- Boneless skinless turkey breast
- 1 tablespoon olive oil or oil spray
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 2 cups dry cornbread stuffing
- 1 (15-ounce) can cream style corn
- $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ pound sliced ham
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry stuffing, finely ground
- 1 can commercial turkey gravy (or homemade)

Using a meat mallet, pound breast to uniform thickness of about 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Brush lightly with oil and sprinkle with poultry seasoning. In a bowl, mix stuffing and corn. Place a layer of ham slices on breast and spread stuffing mixture to cover. Roll the breast jelly-roll style. Depending on size, you may get a tri-fold only. Place folded side down on parchment paper on a baking sheet. Brush with oil and coat with finely ground stuffing. Bake at 350° for about 55 min. or until meat temperature reaches 165° . Let rest 10 min. before slicing. Serve with cranberry orange relish and turkey gravy.

Relish

- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- $\frac{1}{2}$ large orange, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 tsp orange zest (optional)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar

Mix all ingredients in small saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat and simmer until berries pop and sauce thickens (about 10 min.). Orange juice may be substituted for orange pulp and water or experiment with other citrus fruits or even pomegranates. May be made in advance and kept in refrigerator for several days.

Recommended side dishes: Mashed potatoes (for this dish, we like redskins, mashed with skin on) and glazed carrots. Mix sliced carrots and equal parts real maple syrup and water to almost cover carrots in a pot. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer until glaze thickens and carrots are tender, but still crisp. If carrots cook before the glaze thickens, just remove them and continue simmering the glaze, adding carrots back when glaze has thickened. Fresh parsley makes a nice garnish.

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

This is Not Disneyland

In a world where shrinking habitats place wildlife closer and closer to people, I have seen firsthand that some folks have taken on an almost Disney-like attitude toward what should be considered wild animals. Because of this, more people have been hurt by wild creatures and, in some cases, the animals were destroyed for just being animals and protecting themselves.

We should all be very mindful that no matter how "tame" or "friendly" a wild animal appears, it is wild and we should respect that. We should also respect an animal's "space" as well as understand what is going on with it year round. For example, late October and on into November is the white-tailed deer breeding season. During this time big bucks are preoccupied with searching out does and guarding the ones they locate. This is prime time for photographing bucks as well as capturing interesting behaviors. It is also a time when the animal's normal vigilance is lessened by the more powerful preoccupation to breed.

This can be very deceiving. An animal that allows us to approach close may lead some folks to believe that it is unafraid and thus tame when actually an animal which is unafraid of people is MORE dangerous because it is more likely to protect itself as opposed to moving away or running off. (And don't forget, it also could be sick.)

One time I saw a man try to put his arm around a big white-tailed buck for a photograph. He just walked right up to the buck, causing the doe it was guarding to scurry off. The only thing that saved him from being hurt was my yelling at him. (I won't tell you what I said.) Another time I saw some young children



While photographing in Shenandoah National Park, this park visitor walked right in front of me with a point and shoot camera to get within 10 feet of a white-tailed buck I was photographing with a 500mm lens. The buck stomped his haaf, snorted a warning, and left when the man didn't move away. ©Lynda Richardson

(with their mothers!!!) feeding crackers to a group of does. One of the does reared up and knocked one child down with her hooves. That child could have been killed.

So... despite all those Disney scenes about loving wild creatures, the concept only pertains to the fantasy world of 'make believe'. Wild animals will always be wild, so please treat them with respect, enjoy them from a safe distance, and let them be wild. □

CORRECTION:

Oops...the two photographs of zinnias in the September Photo Tips were accidentally reversed, so were incorrectly identified. The first image shown was shot at f22.0 for maximum depth-of-field while the second

photograph was shot at f4.0 for minimum depth-of-field. I'm hoping you realized this after reading the article; sorry for any confusion caused!

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with our readers.

Image of the Month



Congratulations to David Timmons of Powhatan for his wintry, one picture story of nature in ocean. After a snow storm David trudged out into the new snow looking for something to photograph when he came upon rabbit tracks which ended with the wisp of a raptor's wings and no more rabbit tracks. You can guess how this story apparently ended. Good spotting, David!

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OUTDOOR CATALOG



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